

## Message Text

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BEIRUT FOR REGIONAL LABATT

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, KU

SUBJ: CHANGING LABOUR UNION TACTICS IN KUWAIT

REF: A. KUWAIT A-35; B. KUWAIT 3623

SUMMARY: DISCUSSION OF RECENT STRIKE ACTIVITY WITH SENIOR KUWAIT OIL COMPANY OFFICIAL WHO DEALS WITH LABOR RELATIONS BROUGHT OUT TWO DEVELOPEMENTS: THE REVIVAL OF LABOR UNION ACTIVITY IN VE OIL SECTOR AFTER ALMOST A YEAR OF QUIESCENCE; AND THE ADOPTION BY THE OIL WORKERS' UNION OF NEW TACTICS TO COPE WITH THE CHANGED SITUATION IN THE OIL INDUSTRY. END SUMMARY.

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH SENIOR OFFICIAL AT KUWAIT OIL COMPANY (KOC) ACTIVE IN LABOR AFFAIRS, EMBOFF RAISED THE MATTER OF TWO RECENT STRIKES IN KUWAIT: THAT OF CONTRACT LABOURERS WORKING FOR A LEBANESE CONSTRUCTION FIRM, CONCO, AT THE KUWAIT NATIONAL PETROLEUM COMPANY (KNPC) REFINERY; AND THAT OF SOME WELLHEAD WORKERS AT KOC.

2. CONCO STRIKE HAS BEEN REPORTED SEPERATELY (SEE REF XXLM WELLHEAD STRIKE BEGAN ON SEPTEMBER 1, WHEN 35 WORKERS IN THE PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT WORKING AT VARIOUS OIL FIELDS WALKED

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OFF THEIR JOBS, PROTESTING PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT GIVEN TO

FOREIGN EMPLOYEES (SPECIFICALLY, COMPLAINTS WERE MADE THAT FOREIGN EMPLOYEES RECEIVED UP TO FOUR ASSISTANTS WHILE KUWAIT EMPLOYEES OF EQUAL LEVEL RECEIVED NONE, AND THAT FOREIGN EMPLOYEES WERE REPLACED BY OTHER FOREIGN EMPLOYEES AND NOT BY QUALIFIED KUWAITIS). UNION OF KOC WORKERS TERMED THE MOVE "RASH", AND DISASSOCIATED ITSELF FROM THE WORKERS ACTION. ON SEPTEMBER 3, WITH HELP OF UNION AND UNDERSECRETARY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND LABOUR, STRIKE WAS ENDED, WITH UNDERSECRETARY PROMISING TO LOOK INTO WORKERS DEMANDS, AND THE WORKERS EXPRESSING THEIR GRATITUDE TO UNION FOR ITS SUPPORT IN ENDING THE STRIKE.

3. KOC LABOUR AFFAIRS OFFICIAL, IN DISCUSSION, PROVIDED INTERESTING BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON WELLHEAD STRIKE. POSITION OF COMPANY WAS THAT IT WOULD NOT DEAL WITH WORKERS IN AN AD HOC BASIS (IN FACT, KOC FELT THAT SUCH AS HOC GROUPS WERE "SUBVERSIVE" AND THUS ILLEGAL), BUT ONLY THROUGH OIL WORKERS UNION. AFTER CONSULTATION WITH SHEIKH SALEM AL-SABAH, MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND LABOUR, KOC READIED ITSELF TO MAN WELLHEAD WITH CONTRACT PERSONNEL (NO INTERRUPTION IN PRODUCTION OCCURRED) AND THREATENED TO FIRE STRIKERS UNLESS THEY WERE BACK TO WORK BY SEPTEMBER 6. THE STRIKERS HAD PREVIOUSLY REJECTED AN INVITATION FROM SHEIKH SALEM TO MEET AND DISCUSS PROBLEM, BUT, FACED WITH KOC THREAT, NOW SOUGHT TO SEE MINISTER, WHO PROMPTLY REFUSED, DIRECTING THEM BACK TO KOC. AT THIS POINT UNION INTERVENED, AND AFTER SOME NEGOTIATION WITH KOC WERE ABLE TO GET STRIKERS BACK TO WORK, WITH LOSS OF STRIKE DAYS PAY AS ONLY PENALTY.

4. IN DESCRIBING BACKGROUND OF THE TWO STRIKES, LABOUR RELATIONS OFFICIAL MADE CLEAR HIS BELIEF THAT STRIKES REPRESENTED AN ATTEMPT BY THE OIL WORKERS' UNION TO REGAIN SOME OF INITIATIVE IT HAD LOST WHEN GOK CRACKED DOWN ON UNION THREAT TO STRIKE IN AUGUST 1974 (REFA). OFFICIAL FELT STRIKES WERE OF INTEREST ALSO BECAUSE THEY REPRESENTATIVE EXAMPLES OF NEW TACTICS THAT OIL SECTOR LABOUR UNIONS WOULD BE EMPLOYING TO REGAIN THAT INITIATIVE.

5. IN CONCO STRIKE, THE TACTICAL INNOVATION INVOLVED WAS AGITATION AMONG FOREIGN CONTRACT LABOURERS (WHO ARE USED EXTENSIVELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN BOTH KOC AND KNPC), IN ORDER TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FOR UNION AMONG THESE WORKERS AND AMONG KUWAITI WORKERS IN GENERAL, AND IN ORDER TO CIRCUMVENT GOK OPPOSITION OR KUWAITI WORKER INDIFFERENCE ON CERTAIN ISSUES. OFFICIAL CITED ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THIS TACTIC: DEMANDS OF UNION, MADE RECENTLY, FOR OVERTIME PAY FOR HOURS WORKED IN EXCESS OF 8 HOURS A DAY. OFFICIAL EXPLAINED THAT CURRENTLY, FOR TECHNICAL AND SAFETY REASONS, WORKERS ARE ENGAGED IN SHIFTS OF MORE THAN 8 HOURS, WITH LONGER TIME OFF IN

BETWEEN. WORKERS PREFER THIS ARRANGEMENT AS IT ALLOWS THEM MORE TIME TO TRAVEL TO AND FROM WORK SITES, SAYS OFFICIAL, AND THUS THE UNION COULD NOT OBTAIN RANK-AND-FILE SUPPORT. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THE UNION HAS BEGUN TO RAISE THE SAME ISSUE AMONG CONTRACT LABOURERS WORKING ON MARINE OPERATIONS.

6. IN WELLHEAD STRIKE, OFFICIAL BELIEVED THAT ANOTHER UNION PLOY WAS TAKING SHAPE: OFFICIAL NON-INVOLVEMENT WITH SECRET ENCOURAGEMENT OF WILDCAT STRIKES, IN ORDER TO AVOID HAVING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY VIS-A-VIS GOK FOR STRIKE ACTION BUT AT THE SAME TIME GAINING BENEFITS OF SUPPORT FOR DEMANDS. HE ADDED NO OTHER EXAMPLES OF SUCH ACTION, BUT FELT THAT USE OF THIS TACTIC WOULD GROW IN THE FUTURE. IN FACT, OFFICIAL PREDICTED THAT, FACED WITH THE GOK POLICY OF FIRM OPPOSITION TO STRIKE ACTION COUPLED WITH CONCILIATION IN AN EFFORT TO BUILD UP THE POSITION OF MODERATES WITHIN THE UNION, THE RADICAL ELEMENTS WOULD RESORT TO THE "ANONYMITY" TACTIC EXCLUSIVELY AND GO UNDERGROUND.

7. FINALLY ( AS REPORTED IN SEPTTEL), OFFICIAL SAID THAT LABOUR UNION ACTIVITY HAS RECENTLY GROWN IN SUBTLETY AND SOPHISTICATION IN OTHER ASPECTS. HE NOTED FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE UNION PRESENTED ITS CASE BETTER IN MEETINGS WITH KOC AND WITH GOK OFFICIALS AND IN GENERAL HANDLED THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS FAR MORE SKILLFULLY. OFFICIAL STRONGLY SUSPECTED, BUT COULD NOT PROVE, THAT REASON FOR THIS DEVELOPING SOPHISTICATION LAY IN ADVICE TO THE UNION COMING FROM COMMUNIST AND RADICAL ARAB COUNTRIES.

8. COMMENT: EMBASSY HAS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED ON DEFEAT SUFFERED BY OIL WORKERS IN CONFRONTATION WITH GOK IN AUGUST OF LAST YEAR AND ON PERSISTENCE OF RADICAL INFLUENCE IN THE UNIONS. EMBASSY HAS ALSO REPORTED ON CONTACTS BETWEEN KUWAITI TRADE UNIONISTS AND COMMUNISTS COUNTRIES. BOTH FACTS LEND INDIRECT SUPPORT TO VIEW OF OFFICIAL (WHO, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, IS A SENIOR POLICY-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MAKER FOR LABOUR AFFAIRS IN KOC) THAT THE UNIONS ARE ENTERING A NEW PERIOD IN THEIR DEVELOPEMENT, AND THAT THE UNIONS ARE DEVELOPING NEW METHODS AND PROCEDURES TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE DEVELOPEMENT OF A COHERENT GOK LABOUR UNION POLICY FOR THE OIL SECTOR.  
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